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An Appreciation  
of  
Padraic H. Pearse  
First President of the Irish Republic



BY  
William G. O'Farrell, O.C.C.

By Transfer

SEP 30 1910



PADRAIC H. PEARSE



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To

THE VERY REVEREND PETER ELIAS MAGENNIS,  
O. C. C.

As a token

Of a life-long esteem and an appreciation  
Of his untiring efforts in the cause of Ireland,  
This essay is affectionately dedicated.

Chas. F. Connolly, Union Label Printer  
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New York





## FOREWORD

The scant leisure time afforded me from my missionary duties I willingly and with much pleasure devoted to reading and lecturing about Ireland's hero and martyr, Padraic H. Pearse. After the first lecture delivered in New York City, an editor of a weekly paper approached me for the manuscript which I was unable to give for the simple reason that such a commodity was not in my possession. The request, however, was received by me as a hint to put my thoughts on paper, and this I did to such an extent that no editor, even the most willing, could be expected to publish them in a weekly paper. This together with the hope of making this great man known and consequently loved by the many who perhaps could not find time to peruse the pages of a more lengthy volume account for my ready submission to the further suggestion to publish them



in the present form. I am aware that this essay would be more complete had I been able to procure the remainder of Pearse's writings published in Ireland, but which owing to the *paternal solicitude* of a *wise* censor have not yet reached this side of the Atlantic. However, the material I had to hand gives the character, the thoughts, the aspirations of the man; what remains treats more of his national life, and of this we may in truth say: "nothing became him in life like the leaving it."

I wish to express my gratitude to Mr. Liam Mellows, F. D. E., an Irish patriot and an intimate friend of Padraic Pearse, for his valuable suggestions in his reading of the proof sheets.

THE AUTHOR.



## Padraic H. Pearse

A new era is dawning over the world. Europe is awakening from "the nightmare sleep of nations beneath kings," and Freedom's sacred fire is all aglow in the hearts of individuals and of peoples. Ireland's voice for freedom which has sounded incessantly through the dark ages of oppression to-day rings louder and more hopeful. Three years ago the tricolor of an Irish Republic was unfurled to the breeze, and men beheld with joy the approach of their long expected redemption. It is natural that when the names of those who are hailed as the champions of liberty and justice are spoken of with the reverence due to a hero our thoughts should turn to him who was the soul of the Irish Republic, to him who died that Innisfail might live. Padraic Pearse might have been a noted barrister, a world renowned educationalist, a profound scholar, or a faithful disciple of Apollo. Instead he "turned his back on the dream he had shaped" and set his face to walk another road and to do another work. To this end he would devote the best energies of a gifted mind and a healthy body, to accomplish his ideal he would pay the supreme price. Unlike a Hamlet philosophising through an entire lifetime on the best means to use in following a dictate of conscience, once he determined that his coun-

try needed his service this son of the Gael went bravely and unflinchingly forward.

Ireland's metropolis has the honor of being the birthplace of Padraic Pearse. He was one of a family of four, two sisters and one brother, William, who also was executed. His mother is an Irish Catholic, and his father was an Englishman and a convert to Catholicity. Having completed his secondary education in the Christian Brothers' school where he began the study of his native tongue, he entered on a higher course of studies in the Catholic University College then a teaching college for the old Royal under the control of the Jesuit Fathers now a constituent college of the National University of Ireland. Apparently no cleverer than the average student the years of his university training were distinguished only by a careful and diligent study of the Irish language and literature; and an earnestness which characterised him in all his endeavours. He graduated from this college receiving the degree of Bachelor of Arts, and shortly afterwards was called to the Bar. An instructive and an impressive, without being oratorical, speaker had he practised his profession his success was assured. Of a shy and retiring disposition his conversation with the casual acquaintance on the ordinary topics of life was scant and prosaic. With the coterie of kindred

spirits and when the theme was an Irish-Ireland his speech had the zeal and power of a missionary. The peroration of his eulogy at the graveside of O'Donovan Rossa is a striking example.

At the early age of sixteen he placed himself in surroundings in which the ideal and the aspirations of his heart were to be realised. The Gaelic League stood for all that was best in the revival and the development of the traditions of Romantic Ireland. Her industries, her language and literature, her music, her games and customs needed fostering if the couplet of Yeats:

*"Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,  
It's with O'Leary in the grave,"*

is to remain untrue. This is the task that that bright band of scholars undertook to do. What a congenial atmosphere for the true lover of Ireland! Here he would meet men whose thoughts and aspirations, in substance at least, were similar to his; men of the calibre of Dr. Douglas Hyde a Gaelic scholar, and the President of the Gaelic League with whom he became acquainted. His admiration for him he expressed in the words, "I have served under him since I was a boy. I am willing to serve him until he can lead and I can serve no longer." He was appointed editor of *An Claidheamh Soluis* (*The Sword of Light*),

the weekly paper of this organization. He studied Irish, and in order that he might speak it more fluently, he used to dwell for months at a time in a little cabin amongst the peasants of Iar Connacht. By this sojourn in the beautiful wild West he gained a mastery over the language enabling him to continue the efficient editor of "the organ of militant Gaeldom." In this mouthpiece of an Irish-Ireland he clearly expressed his views in a number of articles written in the two vernaculars, Irish and English. In the performance of this fruitful employment he never relaxed his efforts until he left the office of *An Claidheamh Soluis* to assume the role of an educationalist.

Pearse had something new to add to the meaning and true method of education. The issue for Christmas, 1909, of *An Macamoh*, (The Youth), an occasional review written for the pupils of St. Enda's school, contains his views on the scope of education. Many modern systems are decried without claiming originality for his own. On the contrary he awards the palm to the solution of the Gaelic sages of two thousand years ago. With them "to educate" meant "to foster." The teacher was a "fosterer," and the pupil was a "foster-child." The function of the master was not "to guide," "to prepare for examinations," "to indoctrinate"



nate." He was to develop the latent qualities of the child, to aid him to realise himself in the best and noblest way, and whilst doing so to regard each pupil as an individual human soul requiring individual fostering.

When endorsing this method Pearse had in mind the baneful results of the "cramming" system occasioned by the Intermediate education of Ireland, resulting, in many secondary schools, in the neglect of those who refused "to be crammed."

He goes on to develop what is implied in this theory of education. To perform this God-given work the teacher should not be the rejected of all other professions (another defect in the Intermediate schools). He should be endowed with the noblest qualities of soul, or mind, and body. The teachers should be "the captains; the poets, the prophets of their people." Again, that the child may be "fostered" two conditions are necessary. "In the first place," to use his own words, "education of a child is greatly a matter of congenial environment and, next to this, of wise and loving watchfulness whose chief appeal will be to the finest instincts of the child itself." Writing of the congenial environment he must have recalled the hovels used as schools by the National Board in the country parts of Ireland.

In the choice of method he favoured the bi-

lingual system. To obtain a thorough knowledge of it he studied in Belgium and Holland, and decided that it was the method to use in the education of Irish youths where the teaching of their language is essential. It succeeded in Belgium, why not in Ireland? He would put it to the test by starting St. Enda's college for boys, the first Catholic lay college in Ireland. The success of the bi-lingual and of all Pearse's educational theories is gauged from the fact that owing to the sudden increase in the number of the students St. Enda's had to be transferred from Cullenswood House, Rathmines, Dublin, to a much more spacious eighteenth-century mansion, the Hermitage, situated in Rathfarnham, a suburb of Dublin, and in the vicinity of the Irish Carmelite Novitiate. Cullenswood house was opened as a school for girls, and called after St. Ita, the Irish saint. The task of keeping alive the fast dying chivalry of an Irish nationhood must begin with the children. St. Enda's contained all that was necessary for its accomplishment. The congenial environment was present in the beautiful grounds almost at the foot of the Dublin mountains, and the ancient castle whose walls were decorated with paintings depicting incidents in Irish history. The teachers were men after the Head-master's own standard. Thomas MacDonagh, scholar, poet and patriot,

was the principal until like Pearse, he bore the suffering and death of the true patriot. These together with an Irish curriculum—text-books, games, and an Irish corps of boy-scouts (trained by Colbert, another sufferer in the Rebellion), commanded the approval of all those “who would bring back again in Ireland that Heroic Age which reserved its highest honor for the hero who had the most childlike heart, for the king who had the largest pity, and for the poet who visioned the truest image of beauty.”

Pearse's literary work began when he became editor of *The Sword of Light*. Now that he was engaged in the work of education all his compositions were directed to the same end. He wrote six plays and produced them some in St. Enda's, others in the Abbey Theatre, Dublin; his brother, William, playing a leading part in most of them. A pageant of the “Boy-Deeds of Cuchulainn” was produced in 1909, the close of the first academic year of the college. The story of the “small, dark, sad boy, comeliest of the boys of Eire,” and a great part of the dialogue is taken from the Tain. The play abounds in the inspiration which the writer purposed to instil into the heart and mind of the pupils. “I am anxious,” he writes, “to crown the first year's work with something worthy and symbolic; anxious to send our boys

home with the knightly image of Cuchulainn in their hearts, and his knightly words ringing in their ears." The Elizabethan drama with Shakespeare as its perfection had its initial stages in the Passion, Miracle, and Morality plays, and the Irish drama was to begin in the same way. "Iosagán," a miracle play was produced in 1910, and the year following a "Passion Play." The author being a devout Catholic, a religious strain is present in all his writings, but in these two plays the theme is religious. Of the former he writes in "An Macaomh." "Iosagán is not a play for ordinary theatres or for ordinary players. It requires a certain atmosphere and a certain attitude of mind on the part of the actors. It has in fact been written for a performance in a particular place and by particular players. I know that in that place and by those actors it will be treated with the reverence due to a prayer." Founded on his story of the same name "Iosagán" (Little Jesus), is a representation of the mercy of God granted to an old man, Matthias, who had spent a careless, irreligious life. The eleventh hour conversion appears to be the reward of the old man's kindly love for the children to whom he sang nursery rhymes. The scene is laid in Iar-Connacht; the characters are modelled on the people amongst whom he lived and with whom he

talked during his sojourn in this part of Ireland. The tale is simply told and the moral carefully pointed.

In 1912 he published a morality, "The King," and three years later "The Master," and "The Singer" appeared. "An Ri" resembles a play of Rabindranath Tagore, the two portraying the image of a humble boy and the pomp of death. Pearse writes of it: "Since I read Mr. Tagore's manuscript I have realised that the two plays are more similar in theme than I had suspected, and that mine will be to his in the nature of an "Amen." Of this and the "Master" it may be said, what is true of all his plays, that the characters are drawn from real life; a moral is intended. The "Singer" is generally regarded to be his best dramatic effort and deserves more lengthy mention.

Joseph Plunkett said of the "Singer": "If Pearse were dead this would cause a sensation." Pearse himself denied that it was a personal revelation, nevertheless detailed analysis, and comparison with his other writings and especially his life will show that Plunkett was not wrong. The principal character in the play is MacDara, the singer. The resemblance between this character and Pearse is so striking that we may say with no small degree of probability that MacDara is Pearse himself. For instance, the description of MacDara

given by Cuimin, a character in the play is equally true of Pearse. "Young, they say, he is and pale like a man that lived in cities. . . . shy in himself and very silent, till he stands up to talk to the people. And then he has the voice of a silver trumpet, and words so beautiful that they make the people cry. And there is a terrible anger in him, for all that he is shrinking and gentle."

Pearse in his frequent references to the work that he must do for Ireland seems to have had a prophetic vision of the death he was to die. The "Singer" contains like forebodings regarding MacDara. "I seemed to see myself brought to die before a crowd that stood cold and silent," says MacDara, "and there were some that cursed me in their hearts for having brought death into their houses. Sad silent faces seemed to reproach me. Oh, the wise sad faces of the dead—and the keening of women rang in my ears." In this connection we should recall Pearse's description of a dream he had, "the only really vivid dream I ever had since I used to dream of hobgoblins when I was a child." He dreamt he saw a boy of his college ascending a platform to die for Ireland's, or some other august cause. The boy was surrounded by a crowd that was neither friendly nor hostile but silent and unsympathetic. Those people looked upon him as a fool who

was throwing away his life, rather than as a martyr who was doing his duty.

Again there is an apt description of Pearse in the remarks of MacDara about a poet: "He is only a voice that cries out, a sigh that trembles into rest. The true teacher must suffer and do. He must break bread to the people. He must suffer and go into Gethsemane, and toil up the steep of Golgatha." Mrs. Pearse can say of her son what Maire says of MacDara: "MacDara is the Singer that has quickened the dead years and all the quiet dust." The play ends with the sublime thought elsewhere expressed by Pearse: "One man can free a people as one Man redeemed the world. I will take no pike, I will go into the battle with bare hands. I will stand up before the Gall as Christ hung naked before men on the tree."

These and many other passages in the play are internal evidence of Plunkett's contention that the play is a personal revelation. The argument is strengthened by a comparison. The two poems written the same year as the "Singer," namely, "The Fool," and "The Rebel"—are the same in theme and expression as the "Singer," there is little doubt but that the "fool," and the "rebel" is Pearse himself. In the "Singer," the schoolmaster asks MacDara does he remember the poem he made about the robin he found perished on the door-



step. Recall Pearse's beautiful quatrain on a similar incident:

*"O Little bird,  
Cold to me thy lying on the flag;  
Bird, that never had an evil thought,  
Pitiful the coming of death to thee."*

... Apart from sentiment which must needs play a part in our admiration of the writings of Padraic Pearse, his plays have a value all their own. A plot is developed, a tale adorned, and a moral taught in the short space of an act, a recommendation in itself. They are a beginning of a New Literature, or rather the revival of an old literature which Doctor Kuno Meyer says "is the most primitive and original among the literatures of Western Europe." They possess, then, the attractive simplicity of rejuvenescence. They are Irish of the Irish; not, however, the Ireland of pagan times, but Ireland enjoying the choicest blessings of Christianity. How could it be otherwise since the scenes are laid and the characters drawn from Iar-Connacht, a place more remote than any other from Anglo-Saxon influence.

To understand aright what is meant by the Gaelic-Irish characters and atmosphere in Pearse's plays we have but to read them in conjunction with those of the writers connected with the Irish Literary Theatre. I take



this movement because it is contemporaneous with the Gaelic revival from which in all likelihood it received its inspiration. Certainly a place is claimed for it in the Gaelic Renaissance. It comprises play-writers whose productions are staged in the Abbey Theatre, Dublin. These writers, Yeats, Boyle, Synge, Lady Gregory, and others undertook to do for the Irish stage what was begun in England, France, and Germany in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Their purpose is to write plays dealing with Irish life. They are sincere. They succeed in "holding the mirror up to nature," but the reflection in some instances is of pagan Ireland and in many, if not all, the characters are not truly Irish. Not that they give a caricature, nor are they to be accused of the unpardonable fault of sneering. On the contrary, they are true to the original, the original, however, is Ireland under an alien government, and the characters are "hybrids" with a strange mixture of Irish and Anglo-Saxon, the latter predominating. For instance, one of the best known plays of William Boyle is "The Eloquent Dempsey." Dempsey, the leading character, a successful business man in the town of Cloghermore, desires to enter public life. Not content with becoming a Town-Councillor for which his influence with the people and his

eloquence adapted him, he wants to move in high society, "the upper ten," by a government appointment to be a Justice of the Peace. To accomplish his plans he sides with the English officials to present an address to the Chief Secretary, whilst at the same time he signs a protest of the people against it. Stratagem, chicanery, are resorted to, but finally he falls to the ground—the inevitable lot of the man who tries to sit between two stools.

In this satire on the ambitions of a foolish man there is a similarity to Moliere's "*Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*," and written in the same spirit as the French lampoon. But Dempsey is not a Gaelic-Irish character. Yet he is not a mere fiction, for not a few of his type are to be found in Ireland. Who will regard them as Irish? MacDara in the "*Singer*," and the eloquent Dempsey—they can be compared at least in their attitude to English rule—are as opposite as the poles. MacDara is ready to fight against the alien government; Dempsey seeks its honors. The one is the Gael; the other is the "Hybrid."

No one could think of Pearse being the author of "*The Play-Boy of the Western World*," "*A Family Failing*," and "*Spreading the News*," even had they been written in Gaelic. He, like these writers, would correct the shortcomings of his fellow-countrymen,

but his method is different. His correction is positive not negative. True moralist that he is, he will stimulate men to practise the national virtues, more by showing them their beauty than by dwelling on the evil of the opposite vice. Besides, these plays are not the expression of Gaelic thought and life.

Pearse, apart from his skill as a writer, must have been acquainted with the dramatic art. In play-writing it is not sufficient to produce a story or essay written in the form of a dialogue or catechism. There must be action. The play must move if its staging is to awaken and sustain interest. The motion is present if the situations flow from the characters. Pearse's plays, though short, abound in action, and in this respect also they are an advance on the Anglo-Irish plays, notably those of Lady Gregory. To use his own joke, all his masterpieces were written with a view to their performance and the boys to fill the different parts. What he has said of "Cuchulainn" is true of all, namely, "It does not contain a single unnecessary speech, a single unnecessary word." The preparation for the coming strife, the news of Colm's death, and the departure of MacDara, in the "Singer;" the noise of battle in which the king is beaten, the arrival of the defeated monarch to ask a blessing of the abbot, the going forth of the

Boy-king, in "An Ri," afford no dull moment from the rise to the fall of the curtain in these two plays.

The Irish drama, as the literature in general, is still in its infancy. Much remains to be perfected. Youthful writers can do no better than build up and adorn the dramatic edifice on the foundation laid by Pearse and his associates.

It speaks well for the simplicity and the purity of heart of a man when he is attracted to children and they to him. Padraic Pearse possessed the Christ-like love for the little ones. He studied them, and understanding them, he loved them. Had he written a psychology of the child-mind, it would have been a valuable contribution to mental science. His ten short stories show a sympathetic insight into the joys and sorrows, the hopes and fears, the spirituality and the shortcomings of the little denizens of Iar Connacht, placing them high amongst the juvenile tales of modern writers. Originally written in Irish, they have lost little of their simple expressiveness in the English translation, whilst at the same time they are made accessible to those who are not familiar with the language of the Gael. According to the dictum of Dryden, "A thing well said will be wit in all languages," I think the stories of Pearse will retain the moral

force and charm of simplicity, no matter what the mode of expression may be. The translations themselves seem to give a new style of English prose, which though far removed from the use of ponderous words, reaches a high level of description. Here is a passage from the simple charming little tale of "Eoineen of the Birds," one from a number of similar word-pictures: "The 'piper of the ashes' (the cricket) came out, and started on his heartsome tune. The mother stayed by the heartside, pondering. The little boy stayed on his airy seat, watching. The cows came home from the pasture. The hen called to her chickens. The blackbird and the wren, and the other little people of the wood went to sleep. The buzzing of the flies was stopped, and the bleating of the lambs. The sun sank slowly till it was close to the bottom of the sky, till it was exactly on the bottom of the sky, till it was under the bottom of the sky. A cold wind blew from the east. The darkness spread on the earth. At last Eoineen came in.

"I fear they won't come this night," says he. "Maybe, with God's help, they might come to-morrow."

In this passage we have a painting in miniature of a wayside cottage in the country part of Ireland at the close of evening. There is

no profusion. No word of more than two syllables. The whole is simplicity without being "*simpleesse*."

Four of the ten stories are translations of "Iosagán agus Sgéalta Eile;" the remaining six of "An Mátair." In all, with one exception—"Brigid of the Songs"—the theme treats directly or indirectly of a child. The adults serve as a connecting link, and by contrast make the youthful character all the more attractive. Maire, the childless woman, "hugs her heart and whispers in the dead of night to the child that isn't born, and will not be." She obtains this blessing by the personal visit of The Mother of God and The Child Jesus on Christmas Eve. Nora, weary of the restraint and trials of parental care, seeks her freedom on "the roads," whence she is recalled by a vision of The Saviour on His dolorous way: "Let me go with you Jesus, and carry your cross for you." Brigid of the Songs with the pride and unconquerable perseverance of the Celt, walks from Galway to Dublin to compete for the prize. She succeeds and by her death wins "a greater reward than the first prize." A loving kindness toward his little sick sister tempts Anthony to rob a doll. But "conscience doth make cowards of us all." The thief confesses his sin and receives from the priest the untheological penance to clean the doll's

house once in the week for Eibhlin. With a futile expectancy the return of Coilin is awaited by the Keening Woman. Much self-sacrifice to procure his release from prison ends only in the sad news of his untimely death. Iosagán (Little Jesus), playing with the boys, converts old Matthias. Padraigeen, with a shirt for an alb and a school-book for a Missal, plays at saying Mass. His mother, remembering that coming events cast their shadow before, says to herself: "My little son will be a priest. And how do I know that it's not a Bishop he might be by and bye?" Brideen is taught the lesson that old friends are best, and that death is the greatest test of one's love for a friend, by her rejected doll, Barbara, falling from the dresser at the critical moment to save her from burning. Eoineen of the Birds, with the gift of a Saint Francis of Assisi, converses with the swallows. In the Autumn he departs with them "to the country where it does be summer always." With a superstition arising from the simple faith of the Irish in the power of a priest, the death of a little girl is attributed to the Dear Daol, the cursed woman.

Since "brevity is the soul of wit" these tales are its synonym. Nor is the narration incomplete because of this. The tale is told and the moral lesson taught with a grace and sweet-



ness in these where children are the centre of the theme, and with somewhat of severity where they play a minor part. The contrast may be accounted for by the application to life in Ireland of the idea contained in Saint Paul's expression: "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child. But when I became a man, I put away the things of a child." In the morning of life the child is happy amongst his toys and baubles. He speaks little and understands less the wrongs heaped upon his native land. Her natural beauty attracts the eye; her melody charms the ear, shedding a lustre on his young life. When he becomes a man these are laid aside and he is confronted with the stern reality of an oppressed country. The hopes and fears which such a condition begets gives us a Muirne of the Keens, and a Coilin. Or it may be that there are two different periods of time: before and after the invasion of the Gall. Certainly he strikes a different note: *l' allegro*, and *il penseroso*.

Nowhere more than in his stories do we see that Pearse possessed the never failing characteristic of the Irish people: a love of the supernatural. Known to his friends to be of a deeply religious temperament his writings are an utterance from the abundance of the heart. Nor is it in prosperity only that he would



look to God as the Giver of all good gifts. Far from regarding adversity as an evil he gives it the true Christian significance. Little Nora of *The Roads* imparts the sublime principle: "Blessed are they that mourn." In her sorrow "she imagined that the place was filled with a sort of half-light, a light that was between the light of the sun and the light of the moon. She saw, very clearly, the feet of the trees, and them dark against a yellowish-green sky. She never saw a sky of that colour before, and it was beautiful to her. She heard a footstep, and she understood that there was someone coming toward her from the lake. She knew in some manner that a prodigious miracle was about to be shown her, and that someone was to suffer there some awful passion. She hadn't long to wait till she saw a young man struggling wearily through the tangle of the wood. He had his head bent and the appearance of a great sorrow on him. Nora recognised him. The Son of Mary that was in it, and she knew that He was journeying all alone to His death. . . . The chain that was tying Nora's tongue and limbs till that broke, and she cried aloud:

"Let me go with You, Jesus, and carry Your cross for You."

Those entrusted with the intellectual, moral,

and religious training of children know the value of a story to the young mind. When the years of the fairy tale are passed for the child and amusement is the least important purpose of the instructor, the stories of Padraic Pearse will supply the present need. Thus will his name be praised and his memory cherished not only by the children of to-day but by the generations yet unborn. We shall see realised his own life's dream:

*"Of riches or of store  
I shall not leave behind me  
(Yet I deem it, O God sufficient)  
But my name in the heart of a child."*

Amongst the poets of the New Literature we find the name of Padraic Pearse. His contribution was given in 1914, when he published a small volume of poems containing but a dozen lyrics in all. The title "Suantraidhe agus Goltraidhe" (Songs of Sleep and of Sorrow), is appropriate for the emotion in all but two of the lyrics, "Lullaby of a Woman of the Mountain," and "Little Lad of the Tricks," is sadness. It is a sadness, however, that does not depress. The two poems on death are the expression of the patriot-poet who is tortured by the desires of his heart and longs for the coming of death that they may be quietened by their realization. It is only because death is the necessary means, under

the existing circumstances, to the accomplishment of his desire that it is:

*"Brighter to me than light of day  
The dark of thy house, tho' black clay;  
Sweeter to me than the music of trumpets  
The quiet of thy house and its eternal silence."*

The gloom then rather exhilarates than casts down. It is a darkness preceding the light; a sorrow that shall soon give place to gladness. In view of this it doth appear that there is a sequence of thought in the two poems on death and the three—"Why Do Ye Torture Me?" "The Ideal," and "I Am Ireland." The former are the logical deduction of the latter.

Even in his poetry he is not unmindful of his dear beloved children. In "The Rann of a Little Playmate," "Little Lad of the Tricks," and "To a Beloved Child," the poet sings about a child; in "A Lullaby of a Woman of the Mountain," "A Woman Keens Her Son," and the personal lyric "I Have Not Garnered Gold," he shares his song with the little ones. The poem, "A Woman of the Mountain Keens Her Son" reminds us of the story of almost the same name and subject.

These together with "O Little Bird," already quoted in this essay, and "O Lovely Head," in which Ireland is addressed as a beautiful woman, but without the hope and jubilation expressed in William Rooney's "O Dear Dark

Head," comprise the entire volume of which Thomas MacDonagh writes in his book, "Literature in Ireland": "One need not ask if it be worth while having books of such poetry. The production of this is already a success for the new literature." And again, "I think them good poetry and true poetry."

It can hardly be true of his poems what was said of his stories that they lose little or none of their value in the English translation. The translations are literal and consequently much of the "verse-music" is absent. This may be asserted of translations from all languages and more particularly of Irish when the poet, as in the present instance, uses some of the older forms of verse which came to him not in written records but by oral tradition. When the poet puts his wine in old bottles the translator who serves up the same in new bottles is not giving the original. The verse-music of the Celt cannot be reproduced in bottles shaped in an Anglo-Saxon mould. James Clarence Mangan, an Anglo-Irish poet of the nineteenth century, may appear to be an exception. He is not. Mangan's translations from the Irish are no more mere translations than those from the German. What he gives is one-third the original and two-thirds Mangan. It is not a translation. It is original verse.

Apart from the versification the poems of

Pearse retain their intrinsic worth in the English version. Writing about this "Suantraidhe agus Goltraidhe" MacDonagh says: "Written in English, it might well have had a sure success." At the present time it bids fair for the translation meeting with this success. Poetry has been defined as "the expression of the beautiful in rhythmic verse." The translation of such into any language will retain the thought of the beautiful and the thought's expression, even though the rhythm may be absent. The soliloquies of Hamlet and the passionate outbursts of Othello are things of beauty in any language. Dante is read and admired by the many who are unacquainted with Italian. Such is the case, in a humbler way, with the translated poems of Pearse. We learn his thoughts of God, of country, and of children, and are attracted by the simplicity and tenderness of their expression; we gain an insight into the aspirations of his profound yet childlike soul.

The twelve "Songs of Sleep and of Sorrow," "The Dord Feinne," "Christ's Coming," and probably "Song for Mary Magdalen," and "The Rann of a Little Playmate"—I say probably, because they are taken from "The Master" of which no Gaelic manuscript is extant—are the bulk of his poems written in Gaelic. Some half-dozen written in English show the force

of MacDonagh's criticism that even using English as the vehicle of expression he is no mean poet. "The Fool," and "The Rebel" strike a personal note and are prophetic. In these verses the poet has laid aside the emotion of sorrow, and whilst there is present a pity and tenderness, they throb with a righteous defiance. "The Fool" and "The Rebel" or—to paraphrase the two in one—"The Rebel," who is regarded as a fool by those who are unable or are loathe to understand the holy aspirations that burn the patriot's soul, beholds the wrongs of his people, and knowing their cause, determines to purchase their redemption by paying the supreme price. He may be called a dreamer, he is to-day by unthinking minds, but he answers:

*"Oh, wise men, riddle me this: what if the  
dream come true?"*

*What if the dream come true? and if millions  
unborn shall dwell*

*In the house that I shaped in my heart, the  
noble house of my thought?"*

The similarity in thought of these two poems to that expressed in "The Singer" has been noted. That one man must die to save the nation as Christ died to save the world was the predominant thought of his life. The extent of this sublime conception may be seen by the analysis of the short religious poem

written for "Christmas, 1915":

*"O King that was born  
To set bondsmen free,  
In the coming battle  
Help the Gael."*

It is a prayer asking the King of Kings who by His death freed man from the bondage of sin to assist the Gael in the coming effort to redeem the nation. Pearse seems to have regarded himself as the Gael called upon to do, or at least to assist in doing this noble work. Being a fervent Catholic the spiritual aspect of the project was uppermost in his mind. The analogy — *salva reverentia* — between the work of Christ and that of the Gael appealed to him. The Redeemer died on Good Friday the despised and rejected of men. Deserted even by His friends He appeared to all but the faithful few to be a defeated Man. The cause for which He suffered was misunderstood by many and doubted by some. Time and time alone was necessary to witness the triumph of apparent failure. "Galillean Thou hast conquered" was soon to be the verdict of the world.

It will be thus with the Gael. He will die for his country, and in doing so some of his friends will leave him, and many will blame him in their heart for the sorrow he has brought into their homes. Apparently a



beaten man, he will see his efforts checked by the numerical superiority of the opposing forces. But the cause will have triumphed. Time will see him crowned with the laurel-wreath, and the palm of victory in his hand. His countrymen will rest in the shadow of Freedom's Tree planted on that great day.

To strengthen the analogy we must remember that Pearse always hoped that the day on which the first shot would be fired for Ireland's freedom might be Good Friday. He did not expect nor did he look for an immediate material regeneration. It must first be spiritual. His Ireland was the Ireland of the past; the Ireland of the high tradition of Cuchulainn, "better is short life with honour than long life with dishonour," "I care not though I were to live but one day and one night, if only my fame and my deeds live after me;" the noble tradition of Fianna, "we, the Fianna, never told a lie, falsehood was never imputed to us," "strength in our hand, truth on our lips, and cleanness in our hearts;" the Christlike tradition of Colm Cille, "if I die, it shall be from the excess of love I bear the Gael."

He would have this the Ireland of the present. Then he turned and beheld with sorrow that the soul of the nation was sleeping almost in the eternal sleep of death. This soul must



be awakened if the nation's treasure is to be something more than the memory of an ancient glory. Sacrifice is the only adequate means for this awakening. He will follow his hero, Robert Emmet, in making this supreme sacrifice.

The task then of Pearse and his associates in Easter Week, 1916, was not political. Politicians had tried, and failed. Politics as such had no attraction for him. He was a patriot with a most exalted idea of patriotism. To him the nation as the individual is composed of a body and soul. Like the individual the soul of each nation is distinct from all others. It must be free to live its own life and to develop along its own lines. The soul of Ireland is that of the Gael. Men, even Irishmen, must be reminded that this soul still lives though grown decrepid. Once this soul is regenerated and freed from the foreign influence that would destroy its very life, then all things else will work unto good.

The work he set himself to accomplish was twofold. He would cast off the unjust rule of the stranger, and in this very act, complete the awakening of the soul of the nation to a consciousness of its destiny, and its latent power to effect its own perfection. The latter is a sacred duty. It touches the very well-spring of the nation's life. Accordingly, no gross mate-

rialism should find a place in the means he will adopt. To a character such as his the materialism expressed in the blasphemous saying: "God is always on the side of the heaviest artillery," is deserving of severe condemnation. He will rise in rebellion; he will use the weapons of war, but not before he invokes the blessing of the God of nations. He will ascend the steep of Golgatha in the cause of Ireland in the same spirit as His Master ascended it for all mankind.

Little wonder that the event of Easter Week, 1916, which appeared to be a foolish endeavour is in the light of the present conditions in Ireland a glorious success. Little wonder, too, that this event which to men who judged from a material standpoint only was a fatal tragedy in the history of a nation is to-day commanding the admiration of fair-minded men over the world.

The two poems "On the Strand of Howth," and "The Wayfarer," are excellent samples of Pearse's appreciation of the beautiful in the things of nature, and his wealth of poetic diction. The music of the waves breaking on the strand of Howth; the chant of the blackbird and the thrush; the minstrelsy of birds in Glenasmole; the ship rocking in the harbour of Dunleary could not be observed and described by one to whom the complaint of

Wordsworth, "the world is too much with us, . . . little we see in nature that is ours," could apply. "The Wayfarer," allowing for the sentiment attached to it—it was written in Kilmainham jail a few days before his execution—is the best of his poems. He describes in a manner worthy of the Nature-Poet some of the beauties of the world: the leaping squirrel in a tree, little rabbits in a sun-lit field at evening, bare-footed children happy in their play on the sands of an ebbcd sea; and then sorrowfully he chants his "*sic transit gloria mundi*."

Although of a serious and taciturn disposition, Pearse was not without a sense of humour. This side of his character was revealed to his intimate friends in whose company he showed his appreciation and enjoyment of the ridiculous. His humour was never gross, always on an intellectual plane. In his writings, though characterised by their gravity and pathos, traces of the humorous can be detected. For instance, in the Christmas number 1910 of "An Macaomh," he tells the story of a Parish Priest who wanted to build a church and had no funds to begin the work. The good priest went to the bank for a loan. When asked by the bank manager what security he had to offer, the priest replied: "Saint Joseph will see you paid."

"Saint Joseph is an estiniabie saint," replied the bank manager, "but unfortunately he is not a negotiable security." This answer passed into a proverb amongst commercial men, and the manager got the reputation of a wit. Before the priest died he saw a church in the course of construction, and to-day it stands as a beautiful monument to his unswerving faith. Pearse adds, "The laugh, to speak without irreverance, is on the side of Saint Joseph." He indulges in the humorous in his three-verse ballad "Napoleon's Oul' Grey Mare." Written in the traditional style of the illiterate Irish ballad-maker, it reminds us of the itinerant singers on a Saturday evening going from door to door in the streets of his native city. Undoubtedly he often heard them himself, not only there, but in his travels through the different parts of Ireland whence he derived no small share of his store of Irish tradition.

Whilst reading the writings of Padraic Pearse I had the good fortune to obtain the loan of the manuscript of his translation from the Irish of an elegy composed by a poet in America on the death by drowning of his child, and sent to him several years ago. The original was published in *An Claidheamh Soluis*, and later the prose translation appeared in the *Irish Review*. Admitting the defects of the

English version which Pearse regarded as wholly inadequate to express the deep melody and exquisite delicacy of the original, it nevertheless gives us some idea of a poem which he himself places among the three best modern poems which "most exquisitely associate the pity of death with the beauty of childhood." This and the additional reason that it is not contained in the collection—published up to the present—of his works, or in any publication of my acquaintance, written on this side of the Atlantic, justify the insertion here of the entire poem:

*"Ochón, O'Donough! my thousand whispers  
    stretched under this sod,  
The sod of sorrow on your little body, my  
    utter anguish  
If this sleep were on you in Cill Na Dronod  
    or some grave in the west  
I would soften my suffering, though great my  
    hurt, and I would not repine for you.  
Withered and wasted are the flowers they  
    scattered on your narrow bed,  
They were lovely for a little time, but their  
    radiance is gone, they have no comeliness  
    or life:  
And the flower I held brightest of all that  
    grew in soil or shall ever grow  
Is rotting in the ground and will spring no  
    more to lift up my heart.*

*Alas, beloved was it not a great pity, the water  
rocking you,  
With no strength in your pulses nor anyone  
near you that might save:  
No news was brought to me of the peril of my  
child or the extremity of his need—  
Ah, though I'd gladly go to Hell's deep flag  
to rescue you.*

*The moon is dark I cannot sleep, all joy has  
left me;  
Rough and rude to me the open Gaelic ('tis  
an ill side);  
I hate awhile in the company of friends, their  
merriment tortures me:  
From the day I saw you dead on the sand the  
sun has not shone for me.*

*Alas, my grief, what shall I do henceforth the  
world wearing me,  
Without your chalk-white little hand like a  
breath through the trees on my sombre  
brow,  
Your little mouth of honey, like angel's music  
sweet in my ears,  
Saying to me gently, dear heart, poor father,  
be not troubled.*

*Ah, desolate I little thought in the time of my  
hope  
That this child would not be a swift valiant  
hero in the midst of the band,  
Doing deeds of daring and planning wisely for  
the sake of Fodla,  
But He who fashioned us of clay on earth not  
so has ordered."*

The dominant characteristic of Pearse as a writer is his nationality and spirituality; the nationality of the Gael and the spirituality of the true Christian. These being the essential elements in the character of the Gael his writings will be read and admired by Irish men and women in the length and breadth of the globe. Children will listen with rapt attention to his stories. Boys and girls will witness with interest and sympathy the performance of his plays. Old men and old women with tear-bedimmed eyes will hear the expression of their choicest thoughts in his poetry. The name of the Head-Master of Saint Enda's College will become, if not already, the household name in Irish homes.

It does not follow that because of this characteristic his public is restricted to the Irish. To every lover of liberty in any land who regards servitude as an injustice and freedom a sacred right, the name of Padraic Pearse is



deserving of honour. As the enemy of oppression and the champion of his country's cause they award him a niche in the Temple of Fame. Like many of his own countrymen they regret not having been personally acquainted with him. Conscious that by his works they can know him they shall turn to the pages penned by his hand to learn much about the man of his age, one of the noblest personalities adorning the annals of Irish history. They will see that it is not merely because of his death that Padraic Pearse is renowned. Certainly that death was a glorious ending to a glorious life. But men have died, in other countries, for a noble cause; blood has been spilt before in Ireland without the same measure of success. His death was the consummation of a short but full span of years in which every thought, word, and action were devoted to his country's welfare. The youth of sixteen summers in the office of the Gaelic League, the Head-Master of Saint Enda's College, the Commandant-General at the head of his men in the Dublin Post Office, the martyr in Kilmainham jail is the same man striving assiduously for the same end. Men with whom ignorance is bliss, and prejudice is preferable to reason, stigmatize him as a "common rebel," a "dreamer," a "madman," a "Boishevist." By his work we can judge if



any of this strange mixture of contradictory epithets may in justice be applied to him. He loved his country and hated the wrongs heaped upon her by her enemy. If this be a crime then nationality has lost its meaning, and consists only in geographical boundaries; patriotism exists only in the pages of a dictionary.

The month of November, 1913, the Irish Volunteer movement started. Padraic Pearse was one of the pioneers of the Provisional Committee. After a short visit to America, where to raise funds for Saint Enda's College—he lectured on education, he returned to Dublin in the spring of 1914, in time to cast his vote against the proposal of John Redmond, the leader of the Irish Nationalist Party, to place the Volunteer movement under his control. His wise foresight was proved a few months later when on the outbreak of the European war, John Redmond espoused the cause of the British Empire, and began a recruiting campaign in Ireland. We can conjecture what line his efforts would have taken had he been in control of the Irish Volunteers. In two successive conventions of this organization Pearse was elected a member of the Executive Committee, and was one of the six composing the Headquarters Staff. He contributed a number of striking articles to a series of propaganda pamphlets called "Tracts for the

Times." His thoughts on the national question were expressed in *The Irish Volunteer*, the official organ of the movement. Seeing in this movement the realization, in part, of his life's dream, no labour was too great to undertake in training his men to emulate the efficiency and heroism of the warriors of the Heroic Age. One wonders, considering the multifarious duties of his college, and his literary pursuit, how time could have been found to comply with the exacting calls of this organization. Ireland was his inspiration, and for her he denied himself the necessities of life, often working into the early hours of the morning. Thus he continued to the end.

On Saint Enda's Day, March 21st, 1916, he addressed the boys at the entertainment in the college, in honour of this great saint. It was his farewell speech. He remarked that the college had gone on successfully for eight years. He hoped it would do so for eighty. Then reminding the boys they were trained to be efficient soldiers in the battles, temporal and spiritual, of their country, he repeated the thought so frequently expressed in his writings, and in harmony with the approaching season of The Passion of The Saviour. Little thought the students when a few weeks later on the day of the Easter vacation they bade farewell to their beloved Head-Master that

this scene was about to be enacted, that he, the Gael, was about "to stand before the Gall as Christ hung naked before men on the tree." Then dawned the glorious Easter Morn; the dawn of Ireland's resurrection.

The history of the Easter Week Rebellion remains to be written. Suffice to say, that Padraic Pearse commanded the men throughout the country from the General Post Office, Dublin, the stronghold of the Volunteers. "Commanded" is scarcely the word to use. He was too gentle and shy to be a leader of men in the strict military sense. Besides he believed in leaders being obeyed more because of admiration and the stimulus of personality than by the imposition of their will upon the will of their followers. This idealism, although beautiful, is seldom practical, especially in military life. However, it was so in his case. He led by the force of his personality. His men were attracted to him with a magnetic attraction. They loved their hero and would go any length to serve him.

The Proclamation issued from the stronghold of the Volunteers was signed by seven signatories. Padraic Pearse was the first name. He was the proclaimed First President of the Irish Republic. Of what followed nothing can be added to the description of his former pupil, Desmond Ryan. " 'Pearse is the

soul of this,' said one present while the Republican flag flew over Dublin buildings and the noblest thoroughfare in Europe mounted into ruins and ashes. While the streets outside roared skyward in leaping and fantastic flames, which made every cobblestone distinct, murmuring hideously and lapping the very clouds, inside a doomed building stood the Head Master unmoved. A cordon of soldiery were closing slowly in and around. The deafening riot of noise which rifles, machine guns and artillery can produce, rang in his ears. Upon him of all men in Dublin rested the weight of the huge adventure. Staring unflinchingly at defeat he walked the last from the darkened tottering house of flame down the bullet-swept streets, past the corpses that dotted the streets, past sombre alleys lighted by the flashes of machine guns to the house where Connolly lay wounded. There he stayed until he walked thence to surrender and die, the old expression of pride and defiance in his eyes—the last glimpse men had of the Head Master of Sgoil Eanna. He has told us the highest thing a man may do is to serve. We, his students, have no greater praise for him than this: he showed us Ireland." Whilst awaiting execution in Kilmainham jail his mother sought permission to see her son before death. What sorrow to her mother's

heart to be denied the opportunity of whispering into his ear her message of love, and sealing it with her farewell kiss. This failing, Padraic wrote his last message to her, written apparently with the unaccustomed composure of a man on the eve of execution. He tells her that he has written the poem she requested, and where it is to be found. This poem is again expressive of the mystical meaning given to his work. His mother with the note of approval of the undertaking commends her son to the protection of the Mother of Sorrows.

*"Dear Mary, thou didst see thy first-born Son  
Go forth to die amid the scorn of men  
For whom He died;  
Receive my first-born son into thy arms,  
Who also has gone forth to die for men,  
And keep him by Thee till I come to him;  
Dear Mary I have shared thy sorrow  
And soon will share thy joy."*

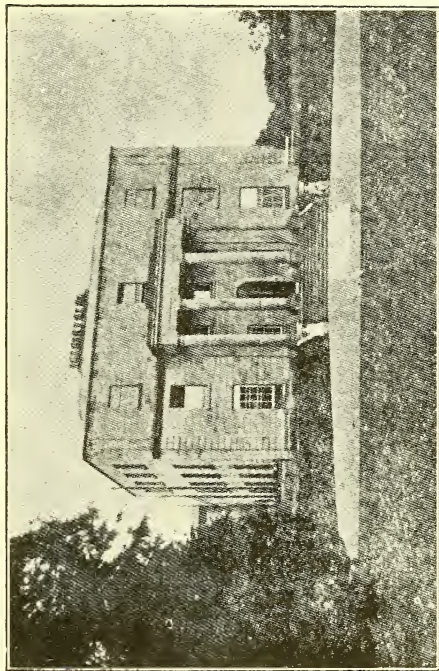
The letter closes with a reassurance of his love. "Good-bye again, dear mother. May God bless you for your great love for me and for your great faith, and may He remember all you have so bravely suffered. I hope soon to see papa and in a little while we shall be all together again. I have not words to tell you of my love for you and how my heart yearns

to you all. I will call to you in my heart at the last moment.

At the break of day, May 4th. Padraic Pearse stood before a firing-squad. A soldier in life he will die a soldier's death. Four bullets were aimed at his head, and four at his heart; the head whose every thought, and the heart whose every throb was for Ireland. At the early age of thirty-six this great man has died that the nation might live. Padraic Pearse is dead—in body, but the instruments of destruction could not destroy his spirit. Freed from its prison house of clay it has entered into the soul of Ireland imparting to it new life and strength. It is wafted in the breeze over the expansive ocean enkindling anew the patriotic fervour of all true Irishmen living under the folds of the Stars and Stripes of America.

*"His dust is dust of the land that bore him  
But lo! his spirit has left the clay*

*It walks abroad through the land to-day."*



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